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Signed
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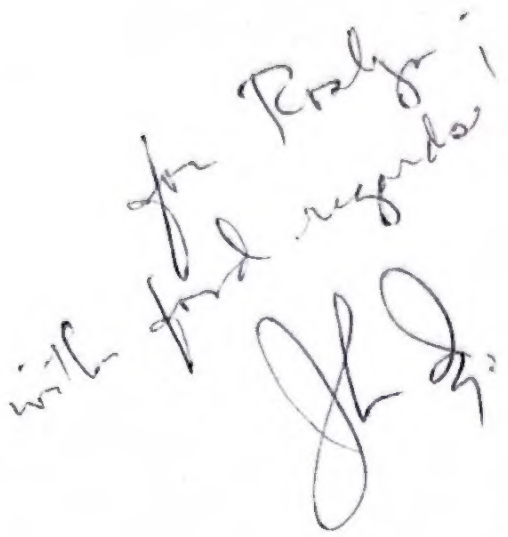
for Ruby
with kind regards!

A CHAMBER FAUST

a lyric suite

A CHAMBER FAUST

a lyric suite

by

JOHN IGO

Wake-Brook House

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for

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FOREWORD

Since my very early teens, I have been fascinated and a little repelled by the Faust theme. There is something powerfully right about the general theme, archetypal, basic; but something insidiously wrong in the treatments I have found — something disquieting, something nagging and unsatisfying. Over and over I have returned to Goethe, to Marlowe, and, later, to others.

Through the years, another Faust shaped itself vaguely in my mind. I have read Fausts in which he is the rebellious hero, the protestant Prometheus of the Renaissance; some in which he is a wily philosopher who hopes to outwit the demon at the end; some in which he is the romantic, tragic victim; and some comic versions in which he is little better than a buffoon.

But always there was the Pact — that colorful, theatrical agreement whereby he sells his soul or his shadow for power and knowledge. The purest Fausts utilize the knowledge theme — it is potent hero-characteristic, liberation stuff.

Then (I am not at all sure when or where or why) I was aware that my own long-brooded Faust was shaped.

Faust in this lyric version is for me an understandable one, and timeless. He is not a Renaissance hero or villain, not an atomic scientist wearing an alchemist's name; he could be another version of everyman. I finally understood my unease: the Pact. No consistent Faust who could be the Faust he has to be in the stories he acts out could have signed that document. I think that perhaps a man could say that he had sealed his soul for damnation twenty-four years earlier on a certain day when he did a certain thing (recognizing it, post hoc, as the beginning of a sequence); but signing a time-limited promissory note? — no.

Faust, here, is damned not for what he signs or says or does; what he is damns him. There is no need for a pact. He has moved beyond humanity, even beyond Dr. Rappaccini — he experiments with himself disinterestedly. To him everything is object, including himself. He is beyond hardness of heart — heart simply has no interest for him. Even his temporary misgivings are more curiosity than unease. He is, if you like, a kind of monster.

If he needs no pact, there is no need for a demon. Mefisto in this version is found in a series of disguises; his real self is recognized only by Faust. It is possible that Mefisto is not there and that it is the use Faust makes of the personage that creates the Mefisto element.

Gerda is only an episode, a physical event. Faust

uses her to test his own capacity for humanity. He discovers something. And the discovery neither repels him nor pleases him. He is beyond that kind of reaction. He is less concerned for Gerda than he is with the problem of communication.

When I decided to do my Faust I decided to do it as a lyric Faust, despite the difficulties and hazards. I had to keep on the line between lyrics that might go anywhere and dramatic speeches that are too anchored to plot to be lyric — the poems had to be self-contained lyrics that, arranged in a certain sequence, did more than they could do individually to illuminate and present not only a familiar story but a view of it. A lyric Faust allowed me to get directly to essences. And each lyric permitted me the validity of soliloquy at the same time I was taking advantage of lyric forms and methods to express other values, such as simplicity, conventionality, hypocrisy, and the like. Each lyric presents the character at a significant moment in the development of the action. I dealt only with hilltops, not valleys and the tedious journeys to and from those peaks.

Several readers have come up with interestingly divergent views. One said that Faust is heartless; another (a Germanic scholar) said that it is the first truly human Faust. One said that I must hate women or I would not have made him treat Gerda that way; another suggested that my heart was breaking for both of them and for the human condition. And of course someone (being fashionable, I presume) found him to be an existentialist Faust.

I have also been asked why I created that kind of Faust. I did him that way because that is the way

he is, to me. I did not plan him that way; he is not the product of books or premise. He is the product of two decades of pondering. He is the way that that aspect of life has explained itself to me.

Faust, here, remains unchanged by the events he passes through. There is no need to go on — one can see what will become of him as he progresses through the rest of his traditional story.

I am not sure I wrote a Faust. I think I learned him.

J. I.

San Antonio, Texas
1964

PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE IN HEAVEN

It broods.

Prowling the fringe of thought, the shy
Immortal, persistent primal dream
Reveals to the unsuspecting eye
Its real unvocal name;

In its gulfed retreating distance
Darkness cools and slows and ceases;
Into its void of vast insistence
The cornucopia past releases

The twelve solitudes.

And changes memory into lace.
Gently over its shelving abyss,
The maw where time sinks without trace,
And hesitant as mist,

Thought hovers downward, while ablaze
With sparks, space, matrix of all seas,
Flows and gathers, waits and weighs
The tensions of its own unease.

And broods.

1

FAUST, in his study, solus

Pallid jester, press your quips
Hard against your bloodless lips;

Let them sting some color through
Flesh that bears a waxen hue.

Teach your crystal darts to turn
Ice to fire and let them burn

Deep within your own pale bones;
Learn to feel the pulse of stones;

Feel the pain your cool smiles shun;
Dare the things you leave undone.

Else, pale jester, hard and cold,
Who will love you when you are old?

MEFISTO, solus

Released by daylight from a dream of my
Engendering, I found that I was caught
In daylight dreams that held me captive, taut
As my dreams hold my victims till they lie
Completely passive in my grasp: was I
The dreamer or the dreamed? A vision taught
Me to beget a mirror image fraught
With life by standing in a mirror's eye . . .

Beneath a crucifix I took a wrought
Steel spike and nailed my hand eye-level high
To hard red wood and found that I felt naught
Except the pounding in my ears. What cry
Of mine could reach beyond the gate I sought
In that bleak dream that lurched and went awry?

FAUST, with the Black Book

What pain I have known and what torture
I have borne without wail or complaint,
But spare me the pain of departure
From Satan, my saint.

What fantasy led me to flee from
The beckoning bands of restraint?
Return, then, to free me from freedom,
O Satan, my saint!

Go kiss the buds awake
And bid them change their hue,
Eat buttercups and slake
Your thirst with morning dew.

And of a wild moon's milk
Ferment narcotic cheese;
With strands of glowworm silk
Enmesh the southwind's knees.

Then brush the ocean's shawl
With a windstorm's tangled hair;
Snare rabbit clouds and all
The stars within their lair.

Filch lace from the sun at noon
To garnish evening's crest,
Then use the night's cocoon
As a bed of gauze, and rest.

FAUST, walking, with a black dog

They are not brief,
The pain and strife,
The delicious grief
Of youthful life.

They are not long,
The smiles and fears,
The sovereign song
Of declining years.

MEFISTO, *as a street-singer, passing*

My couch
Won't do?
I'll vouch
That you,

Who dread
My lust,
Will bed
With dust.

2

GERDA, at the Wheel

The pulsing moon is cold
And slow,
But fierce with fires untold
Compared with warmths I show.

The silver moon is chased
With gold;
Its secrets are encased
In ice no man can hold.

To me, it is feverish and
Unchaste;
With ice for blood, my hand
Can know no lunar haste.

My pulse is slow; no hot
Tight band
Of emotion is my lot;
I am a desert land

Of marble chiselled clean,
But not
Possessed of any scene
To keep me unforgot.

I am silver to the eye,
Serene
As ivories that lie
Secure in their own sheen.

The moon is slow and cold
And high
Above man's scorching hold.
We smile, the moon and I!

FAUST, as Henri

The witchery implicit
In a waxen finger curled
Betrays a mortal visit
From a gentler netherworld.

As magic, fingernails
Put alchemy to shame
And teach the nightingales
To chant their runic name.

No subtler wand exists
Than the small hand, white and still,
That lulls him who resists
Its gentle deadly will.

No priest, no exorcism
Can prevail against the might
Within a hand, the prism
Of the powers of the night.

GERDA

O love, I am not worthy

(My love for you is like the lines that bend
Across my palm, from birth to death and end.)

That you should come to me,

(Within my heart I hold you sealed and calm:
The fist conceals the lines across the palm.)

But if you breathe the word

(As some can read the fate the lines conceal,
Read then beyond the love my words reveal.)

My soul shall be restored.

FAUST, aside

My mind loathes you:
You do it harm.
My love clothes you,
For you are warm.

Your mind is weak
Before the storm,
And bends; you reek,
But you are warm.

You disgust me;
You have no charm,
But you trust me,
And you are warm.

You will fade away
And lose your form,
But you may stay
While you are warm.

Our gravest gulf will ever be
This incompatibility:

You'd make the world of finer stuff,
For me your love is quite enough.

You'd hitch your wagon to a star,
While I would love you as you are:

Earthbound, my joy will ever be
Your star-bemused propinquity.

FAUST, of Helen

At times I look into these eyes
    That open wide with love for me;
    Within their trusting depths I see
My own, remoter than the skies.

Within my dreaming eyes I seem
    To find the forms of vaster things,
    Of times beyond the subtle rings
Of memory and fact and dream.

I see beyond the captive range
    Of haunting eyes that mirror mine
    To eyes as clear and deep and fine,
Which in their turn will seem as strange.

I see a time when there will be
    Still other eyes held wide and dumb,
    While these I see fade and become
No more than fleeting memory.

(Mefisto snickers)

GERDA, in church, before St. Anthony

We shall not meet again,
We part forever, now
That love begins to wane;

As we pronounced no vow,
So should we feel no pain.
We part forever now.

The sun gives way to rain,
And earth renews the bough:
We shall not meet again.

Though time will make us bow,
Our memories will remain:
More than the fates allow

We loved, where others feign.
We part forever now.
And will not meet again.

3

FAUST, before the Sabbat

When the cold and clear
Thin and sexless voices of children
Lift imperfectly in songs of praise,
Angel, thorn the rose and give
The serpent fangs,
Drop deadly scarab words around
The star-pregnant universe,
Sigh a silvered phrase of death
And tenderness, pour the nectar
Of pleasure with its froth of pain,
Unleash the wolves of conscience,
The hounds of memory, salute
The red blasphemers' moon, and shoe
Cauchemar for me : I ride tonight.

MEFISTO, as a succubus

Ephemeral is the nation,
And fleeting is the stone,
But eternal is sensation
And the hungers of the bone.

Enduring is temptation,
And lasting is the dart
Bringing pain from all creation
To the transitory heart.

Evanescent is the tombstone,
And transient is the bust
That exalts immortal bone
And its flesh of deathless dust.

Everlastingly are fired
Deadly flames within the blood
Since a nerveless God conspired
To make flesh of nameless mud.

FAUST, after the Sabbat

It slithers away: I numbly feel
The dawn grow sick with cochineal

And betray the false geometry
Of shades' obsessive poetry;

Protean goblins scurry after
Titanic echoes of snickered laughter;

Non-human concepts, stonehard, clear,
Become unmasqued, unmeaning, drear:

Become the shapes at night they're not,
Unconjured by the coffee pot:

I watch the menace fade with day,
Grow pale, grow vile, and slink away.

FAUST , writing

When passion westers into custom and
Love shrinks from empathy to artifact,

Civility is the anesthetic wind
That fends neighbors off,
    inhibits the tongues of friends,
And numbs living bearable.

    Then we entertain
And trace again the narrow, empty round
Of diversions we once shared,
    and abandoned when

Acquaintance ripened into passion and
Two strangers owned one bright identity.

GERDA, sitting, hands in lap

You're gone:
    I'm left
Alone,
    Bereft

Of all
    I prize;
No pall
    Of sighs

Reveals
    The pain
That reels
    My brain

When dawn
    Rains drone:
Go on —
    Alone.

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MEFISTO, as a grey friar, outside Gerda's cell

Doing egocentric dances
(In never-ending whirl of Self),
Man, deluded, self-entrances:
Pity him.

Voicing anesthetic heartsongs
(Which soothe a cringing flaccid Self),
Man's secluded, bound with fear-thongs:
Pity him.

Having misbegotten visions
(To lift his spirit beyond Self),
Man, precluded, ruins decisions:
Pity him.

Being less than hieroglyphic
(And less a calculus of Self),
Man's excluded from terrific:
Pity him.

FAUST, in Gerda's cell

Where is the word, the stone
Hard-carved to a polished key,
That knows the mystery
Of the complex lock which alone
Keeps barred the fragile gate
Of self within a slate -
Grey world of dust and bone ?

In a world of steel and flints
No fire except by stark
Cruel force is struck; ice glints,
But where, where is the spark
To light the candle of the dark ?

GERDA , mad

He is tall and thin and he has my face,
But his eyes are jet and he has the grace
And dignity of his father's race,
This dark-skinned child of mine.

Dreaming of things he cannot remember,
Stirring the ash in search of an ember,
He probes for spring in my December,
This somber child of mine.

His radiant smile is just face deep;
A gentle dread and wondering keep
His eyes soft and sad, too sad to weep,
This shadowed child of mine.

His long smooth muscles and ebon head
Rouse the memories that will not stay dead;
My bittersweet shadow, I sometimes dread
This swarthy child of mine.

His dusky viola voice recalls
His slim-flanked father, and a fall's
Fire-thrown shadows on the walls,
This black-eyed child of mine.

His body is lithe and its lines are fine,
A silhouette with a passionate line;
But he has a strangeness, a darkling sign
He's but half a child of mine.

None of my blondeness: a blend is there
Of dawn and twilight; fire and air;
My love incarnate, I find him fair,
This smoke-dark child of mine.

FAUST, in his study, solus

Here,
Denying the horizon,
With both feet fixed firmly on this ground;
Raising wrought completenesses
Against the raw suspensions
There . . .

Here,
Refusing claims of time gone,
With a pendulum that clucks its tongue;
Hoarding the five seductions
That renounce a range beyond,
Where . . .

Here,
Proving beauty by the pound,
With a beetle harnessed to a thong;
Taking us to truth's cold bones
To get sickly sons or death
Now . . .

Here,
Waiting, hollow and undone
With grief for mountains that go on;
Gathering a little earth,
Letting it fall back again:
"THOU . . ."

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE IN HEAVEN

It broods.

Prowling the fringe of thought, the shy
Immortal, persistent primal dream
Reveals to the unsuspecting eye
Its real unvocal name;

In its gulfed retreating distance
Darkness cools and slows and ceases;
Into its void of vast insistence
The cornucopia past releases

The twelve solitudes.

And changes memory into lace.
Gently over its shelving abyss,
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Thought hovers downward, while ablaze
With sparks, space, matrix of all seas,
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